

In the Claims:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (currently amended) An improved CZ system for growing a single crystal ingot from a molten crystalline material comprising:

a low aspect ratio, wide diameter crucible including a base and side walls for holding a quantity of molten material at a melt / crystal interface with respect to a seed crystal for growing an ingot from the molten material;

a pre melter for providing a substantially continuous source of molten material to the crucible, such that the melt /crystal interface is maintained at a desired level without vertical travel of the crucible;

annular heating means disposed adjacent to the base of the crucible for providing ~~[[a]] uniform~~ an optimal thermal distribution across the melt and at the crystal melt interface for optimal crystal growth .

7. (currently amended) A system for continuous growth of a single crystal ingot as in claim 1 further comprising a means for adding amounts of dopant material to the pre melter such that ~~[[a]] dopant concentration gradient~~ throughout the ingot is substantially uniform.

9. (currently amended) A system for continuous growth of a single crystal ingot as in claim 8 further comprising a means for adding precise amounts of dopant material as needed to the pre melter such that an axial, (lengthwise), electrical conductivity ~~gradient~~ of the ingot is substantially uniform.

15. (currently amended) A process for improved growth of a single crystal ingot from a seed crystal positioned at a crystal / melt interface in a molten ~~crystalline~~ material comprising:

containing the molten material in a low aspect ratio, wide diameter crucible for reducing convection currents and ~~vertical~~ thermal variations in the melt;

melting solid crystalline ~~material~~ feedstock in a pre melter for providing a substantially continuous ~~output~~ replenishment of molten material to the crucible for maintaining the crystal / melt interface at a desired level in the crucible;

providing a plurality of heaters beneath the crucible for establishing ~~a plurality of~~ corresponding thermal zones across the melt;

controlling the thermal output of the heaters for providing an optimal thermal distribution across the melt and at the crystal / melt interface for improved crystal growth.

16. (currently amended) A process according to claim 15 wherein the step of providing ~~[[a]]~~ substantially continuous ~~source~~ replenishment of molten material to the crucible for maintaining the crystal/melt interface at a desired level comprises:

determining the weight of the crucible both empty and with a desired level depth of melt in the crucible;

~~determining output of the pre-melter based on a desired depth of melt in the growth crucible;~~

sensing the actual weight of crucible and melt during crystal growth; and

controlling the output of the pre-melter based on a difference between the actual weight of crucible and melt during crystal growth and the determined weight of the crucible with a desired depth of melt by actuating a dispenser for controlling release of a predetermined amount of solid crystalline feedstock into the pre melter to maintain the desired depth of melt in the crucible.

17. (currently amended) An improved single crystal material characterized by high minority carrier lifetime, made by the process comprising:

growing the single crystal material from a seed crystal held at a crystal melt interface in a wide diameter, low aspect ratio crucible for preventing formation of convection currents and minimizing oxygen in the melt;

melting ~~[[the]]~~ crystalline ~~material~~ feedstock in a pre melter for perturbation free replenishment of the melt in the crucible ;

providing a plurality of individually controllable thermal zones across the melt; such that an optimal thermal distribution is created across the melt, and particularly at the melt crystal interface .

Please add the following new claims:

18. An improved CZ system as in claim 1 further comprising a weir disposed around the crystal melt interface such that the pre melter provides the continuous source of molten material to the crucible without perturbation of the melt and the crystal melt interface.

19. An improved CZ system as in claim 1 or 7 further comprising:
a low aspect ratio, wide diameter crucible having interior surfaces for containing the molten material coated with a material selected from the group consisting of: alpha or beta sintered silicon carbide, tantalum nitride, or similar ceramic.

20. An improved CZ system as in claim 1 or 7 further comprising:
a low aspect ratio, wide diameter crucible comprising a material selected from the group consisting of: alpha or beta sintered silicon carbide, tantalum nitride, or similar ceramic.

21. A pre melter for providing a substantially continuous source of molten crystalline feedstock to a crucible for growing an ingot from a crystal pulled from a crystal melt interface in molten material contained in the crucible comprising:

a weir for defining a first section of the pre melter having an inlet for receiving the source of solid crystalline feedstock;

a heater provided adjacent the first section for melting the solid crystalline feedstock ;

the weir defining a second section of the pre melter including an outlet positioned substantially at the level of the crystal melt interface, such that the weir directs flow of melted feedstock underneath the weir from the bottom of the first section, upward into

the second section to thereby prevent unmelted, solid crystalline feedstock from passing to the outlet

control means operatively connected to the source of crystalline feedstock and responsive to melt level in the crucible for dispensing crystalline feedstock from the source to the pre melter inlet, such that the crystal melt interface is maintained at a desired level with respect to the growing ingot without vertical travel of the crucible.

22. A system as in claim 21 wherein the control means further comprises:

active feedback means for sensing the weight of melt in the growth crucible and for adjusting an amount of crystalline feedstock provided to the pre melter, and the amount or rate of molten silicon discharged from the pre melter into the melt, such that the depth of molten material in the crucible is maintained at a desired level for optimal crystal growth.

23. A system as in claim 21 wherein the outlet of the second section of the pre melter is provided at an angle for substantially perturbation free distribution of the molten feedstock to the crucible;

24. A pre melter for providing a continuous flow of molten crystalline feedstock to a crucible for growing an ingot at a crystal melt interface therein comprising:

a melting chamber having an inlet for receiving a source of solid crystalline feedstock and an outlet having a distal end positioned substantially at the level of the crystal melt interface for providing non perturbing replenishment of molten crystalline feedstock to the crucible;

a heater adjacent the melting chamber for melting the molten crystalline feedstock ;

a weir provided in the melting chamber between the inlet and outlet for directing molten crystalline feedstock to flow downward beneath the weir and upward into the outlet, thereby preventing unwanted solid crystalline feedstock, by virtue of a density lower than molten feedstock, from passing through the outlet to the crucible.

25. An apparatus according to claim 24 further comprising:

means for sensing the weight of molten material in the crucible corresponding to an optimal level of the crystal melt interface with respect to ingot growth;

control means having an input responsive to the means for sensing and an output lead connected to the source of solid crystalline feedstock for controllably dispensing solid crystalline feedstock to the pre melter, such that optimal ingot growth is maintained in the crucible.

26. An improved process for substantially uniform melting of crystalline feedstock including solid granules characterized by a diameter on the order of 1mm or less in a crucible comprising:

containing the crystalline feedstock in a crucible characterized by a low aspect ratio and wide diameter base;

providing a plurality of independently controllable heaters beneath the base of the crucible to establish a plurality of controllable thermal zones across the crucible, wherein heat is driven uniformly into the granules due to higher surface area of contact between the thermal zones and granules dispersed through the low aspect ratio crucible;

activating each heater such that a thermal output of each heater provides an optimal temperature distribution through the melt for melting the granules uniformly and at a rapid rate;

determining the optimal temperature distribution by measuring power consumption of each heater with respect to time needed to achieve the uniform melting of granules at a rapid rate; and

controlling each heater by applying power thereto in accordance with the measured power consumption.

27. An apparatus for substantially uniform melting of crystalline feedstock including solid granules characterized by a diameter on the order of 1mm or less in a crucible comprising:

a low aspect ratio, wide diameter crucible for holding the molten crystalline feedstock;

a plurality of independently controllable heaters provided beneath the base of the crucible, such that a maximized surface area of contact and minimized thermal path exists between the granules and the independently controllable heaters beneath the low aspect ratio crucible; and

means for applying power to thermally activate each heater to achieve an optimal temperature distribution such that the thermal zones drive heat uniformly into the granules at a desired rate.

28. An apparatus according to claim 27 further comprising:

control means for monitoring power consumption of each heater needed to achieve the optimal temperature distribution and for applying power to thermally activate each heater in accordance with the monitored power consumption to achieve a repeatable state wherein granules melt uniformly at a desired rate.

29. An apparatus according to claim 27 wherein the low aspect ratio, diameter with respect to height, of the crucible is in a range of 4:1 to 10:1 and preferably about 8:1.

30. An apparatus for substantially uniform melting of silicon or polysilicon crystalline material including solid granules down to a diameter on the order of 1mm or less in a crucible comprising:

a low aspect ratio, wide diameter crucible for holding the silicon or polysilicon melt;

a plurality of independently controllable heaters disposed beneath the crucible for establishing corresponding thermal zones through the melt, such that a maximized surface area of contact and minimized thermal path exists between granules in the melt and the independently controllable heaters beneath the low aspect ratio crucible;

means for thermally activating each heater to achieve an optimal thermal distribution across the melt such that granules are melted uniformly at a desired rate; and

means for thermally activating each heater to achieve an optimal thermal distribution across the melt such that granules are melted uniformly at a desired rate; and

control means for selectively controlling thermal activation of each heater by monitoring power consumed by each heater to achieve the optimal thermal distribution across the melt.

31. An apparatus according to claim 29 wherein the low aspect ratio (diameter with respect to height) of the crucible is in a range of 4:1 to 10:1; and most preferably in a range of about 8:1.

32. An improved CZ system for growing one or more single crystal silicon ingots from a molten silicon material comprising:

a low aspect ratio, wide diameter crucible including a base and side walls for holding a quantity of molten silicon at a melt / crystal interface with respect to a seed crystal for growing the ingot from the molten material;

a pre melter for providing a continuous source of molten silicon feedstock to the crucible, such that the melt /crystal interface is maintained at a desired level without vertical travel of the crucible;

a plurality of growth chambers rotatably disposed with respect to the crucible for pulling the seed crystal to form an ingot, such that the same crucible is recharged by the pre melter for each growth chamber;

annular heating means disposed beneath the base of the crucible for providing a uniform thermal distribution across the melt and at the crystal melt interface for optimal crystal growth .

33. An improved CZ system as in claim 31 wherein the annular heating means comprise a plurality of separately controlled resistive heaters disposed in a radial pattern to establish corresponding thermal zones across the melt, each thermal zone controlled by thermal output of a respective resistive heater such that an optimal thermal distribution is established across the melt and at the crystal melt interface.

34. A high purity single crystal ingot characterized by substantially reduced dislocation defects and substantially uniform conductivity or resistivity along the axial and/ or radial dimensions made by the process comprising:

growing the single crystal ingot from a seed crystal held at a crystal/melt interface in a wide diameter, low aspect ratio crucible for preventing formation of convection currents and minimizing oxygen in the melt;

melting crystalline feedstock and providing dopant in a pre melter communicating with the crucible such that a thermally unperturbed replenishment of the melt in the crucible is maintained;

providing a plurality of separately controllable heaters beneath the crucible for establishing controllable thermal zones across the melt and particularly at the crystal melt interface, such that an optimal thermal distribution and is maintained across the radius of the growing ingot.